

REMARKS

Claims 1-10 are pending in this application. Claims 1 and 10 have been amended. No new matter has been added.

Examiner Interviews

The courtesy of the Examiner in conducting telephone interviews with Applicants' undersigned attorney on November 2 and 5, 2010 is greatly appreciated. The substance of the interviews are believed adequately set forth in the Interview Summaries mailed November 5 and November 8 and in the remarks which follow.

During both interviews the construction of Applicants' invention was discussed in detail and compared with the teachings of Bakker U.S. Patent No. 6,231,436. During the interviews, various proposed amendments were discussed with the Examiner. At the conclusion of the last interview on November 5, 2010, it was agreed to amend claims 1 and 10 to include the limitations of the threading element further being adjacent the cutting element and directly above and in near contact with the conveyor belt transport element. While no final agreement was reached on the allowability of the claims with these amendments, the Examiner tentatively agreed that these amendments appeared to distinguish the claims over the prior art of record.

Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §102 and §103

Claims 1-5 and 10 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Bakker (U.S. Patent No. 6,231,436). Claims 6-9 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Bakker as applied to claim 1 above, and further in view of Freund et al. (U.S. Pub. No. 2003/0176158). These rejections are traversed as follows.

Patentability of the Claims

Independent apparatus claim 1 has been amended to further define the threading element of Applicants' invention as being mounted forwardly of the counter surface adjacent the cutting element and directly above and in near contact with the conveyor belt transport element. Independent method claim 10 has been amended in a similar fashion and further has been amended to more specifically refer to using a conveyor belt transport element and reciting that an outer end of the threading element extends at least partially across and in the horizontal transport plane of the meat. It is believed these amendments further distinguish over the Bakker '436 patent as well as over the combination of the Bakker '436 patent and the Freund '158 publication.

In Bakker, the conveyor belt 6 is not underneath the guides 15 and 16 but rather, the conveyor belt is at one end and the only thing underneath the guides referred to by the Examiner as corresponding to the threading element in counter surface of the present invention is a stationary horizontal plate 9 which does not at

all transport any meat product. Moreover, Bakker does not teach that any threading element is mounted adjacent the cutting element. Indeed, the Examiner has only cited column 1, lines 55-61 of Bakker as disclosing a cutting element. That portion of Bakker merely states that "...the legs can be conveyed to an apparatus known as such, for stripping off the meat." Moreover, none of the drawings even illustrate a cutting element.

Applicants' invention as now claimed is directed to an apparatus for the automatic processing of meat such as fish and includes a conveyor belt transport element 11 for transporting the meat and a cutting element 12 such as a circular blade for cutting or trimming the meat. A counter-surface 13 is shown in Figs. 1, 5 and 7 having a slit 26 therein which is provided under the circular blade. A control or regulating apparatus 40 is provided which is functionally connected with the cutting element. Significantly, a threading element 14 is mounted forwardly of the counter-surface 13 in a horizontal transport plane E_1 of the meat. The threading element 14 further is mounted adjacent the cutting element 12 and is directly above and in near contact with the conveyor belt transport element. Moreover, the threading element is bent laterally from the counter-surface in the horizontal plane at a horizontal angle with respect to the counter-surface whereby an outer end of the threading element extends at least partially across and in the horizontal transport plane E_1 to at least partially lift one side of the meat prior to the meat reaching the counter-surface.

As clearly shown in Figs. 5 and 7, the threading element 14 is angled at a preferred angle of approximately 30 degrees to extend at least laterally part of the way across the surface of the horizontal conveyor belt transport element 11 so that the leading edge of the threading element 14 initially contacts one side of the meat being transported along the conveyor belt transport element whereby only a part of the meat is initially lifted off from the conveyor belt transport element. This prevents blunt or frontal impacting of the entire piece of meat on front of the threading device all at once which causes pieces of meat to accumulate and interfere with proper cutting. The remainder of the meat is then lifted off the transport element by the threading element 14 as the meat continues to be moved in the direction of transport. In this fashion, the meat is initially lifted prior to reaching the counter-surface 13 whereby the cutting element 12 is easily enabled to cut or trim the meat. A deflector element 30 is arranged behind the counter-surface 13 in the direction of transport whereby material such as fat which is cut during the cutting process is removed from the transport element. The unit consisting of the counter-surface and the threading element preferable is constructed as an integral unit so as to be swivellable from a position outside of the transport element to a position over the transport element, independently with respect to the apparatus.

Claim 10 is patterned after claim 1 but is directed to the method for the automated processing of meat using the threading element.

Applicants' invention, as described above, is not anticipated or otherwise rendered unpatentable by the Bakker '436 and/or the Freund '158 references.

With respect to the Bakker '436 patent, this reference relates to a method and apparatus for uniformly positioning legs of slaughtered poultry wherein the legs 2-5 are suspended by the ankles by hooks 1 of an overhead conveyor (not shown). A horizontal conveyor belt 6 is positioned under the first part of the overhead conveyor, and the conveyor belt 6 moves at a greater speed 7 than the transport speed 8 of the overhead conveyor. The conveyor belt 6 is placed under the hooks 1 at a distance such that the legs on the hooks touch the conveyor belt and due to the difference in speed between the conveyor belt and the hooks 1, the legs are lifted slightly from their original position shown by leg 2 in Fig. 2 to the position of leg 3 shown in Fig. 3 whereby the legs are loosened slightly from the hooks. Also extending under the overhead conveyor and positioned after the moving conveyor 6 is a stationary horizontal plate 9 whereby as the legs are dragged over the stationary plate the legs are caused to rotate into a position in which they will point sideways in relation to a vertical plane through the overhead conveyor.

The Bakker device further includes guides 15 and angled feed guides 16 for guiding the legs to effect in an interaction with various direction checks 11 and 12 which position the legs properly for further action. The central guide plate 17 is applied on top of the first direction check 11. The conveyor belt 6, however, is not underneath the guides 15 and 16 but is at one end (left end in Fig. 1) and the only element underneath the guides 15 and 16, referred to by the Examiner as corresponding to the threading element and counter-surface of the present invention, is a stationary horizontal plate 9 which does not at all transport any meat product.

In the action, the examiner refers to Bakker as showing a transport element at 1 and/or 6 for transporting the meat. As previously noted, however, the conveyor 1 is not a conveyor belt but an overhead conveyor which has hooks attached thereto to hold the poultry legs. The conveyor element 6 does not transport the meat but only runs at a faster rate of speed than the conveyor hooks 1 to partially loosen the legs from the hooks. The actual transporting of the legs is done by the hooks and not the conveyor belt 6. The examiner further states that Bakker has a counter surface for the cutting element and refers to elements 11-17. Bakker, however, does not show a counter surface used in connection with the cutting element and, indeed, the cutting element is not even disclosed in the drawings but is only mentioned in the specification as "an apparatus... for stripping off the meat".

The Examiner further refers to the straight guides 15 on either side of conveying path and the angled feed guide 16 as a threading element. This construction, however, is totally different from Applicants' invention. The guides 15 are merely guides on the side of the conveying path which do not function as any kind of threading element and the angled guides 16 are merely provided on each side of the conveying path in order to position the poultry legs to be processed. Moreover, the guides are not positioned adjacent the cutting element.

With respect to claim 2, the examiner states that Bakker discloses a threading element at 16 which is integral to a counter surface at 14, 15. As previously noted, the element 16 is merely an angled feed guide and the element 15 is a guide on the side of the path of conveyance. The element 14 is merely an extension of the first

direction check 11 and is not connected to the guides 15 and 16. With respect to claims 3, 4 and 5, the examiner's characterizations of the elements of Bakker are not believed correct when taken in the context of Applicants' invention as claimed.

Claim 10 is patterned after claim 1 but is directed to the method for automated processing of meat using the threading element. This claim is patentable for the same reasons as advanced with respect to claim 1.

Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that claims 1-5 and 10 are patentable over the Bakker '436 reference.

With respect to the rejection of claims 6-9 over Bakker in view of Freund et al., the examiner acknowledges that Bakker does not disclose a unit consisting of a counter surface and a threading element which is swivellable from a position outside of a transport element to a position over a transport element independently with respect to the transport element. To supply this deficiency of Bakker, the examiner cites Freund as disclosing a counter at 21 which is swivellable by means of pivot 50 and gas spring 39.

The Freund et al. patent relates to an apparatus for severing a spare rib from a backbone which is conveyed inside a guide way 2 comprised of two guide plates 21, 22 which define a wedge shaped channel 23 through which the spare rib projects and includes a cutting device or blade 1 which projects into a slot in a transversely moveable guide plate 22.

The Freund et al. device includes a conveyor drive unit 3 having conveyor wheels 33 which is disposed above a guide way 2 which is only described as a guide

way and not a moveable conveyor belt. The conveyor wheels 33 engage the spare ribs and move them along the guide way. The entire conveyor drive unit 3 is pivotable around a pivot point 50 and the pivoting is assisted by a gas spring 39. As shown in Fig. 4, one of the guide plates 21 is attached to the conveyor drive unit 3 whereby it pivots upwardly with the conveyor drive unit. The single guide plate 21, however, is not a counter surface in the manner of Applicants' invention. Moreover, the conveyor drive unit 3 is pivotable only over a stationary guide way 2 which is not the same as a moveable conveyor belt transport item as in Applicants' invention.

With respect to claim 8 the examiner states that the casters 46 and 46a permit the device to be moved through various positions. The casters of Freund et al., however, are far different than the apparatus of Applicants' invention which has nothing at all to do with casters making the unit moveable.

Accordingly, even if the teachings of Bakker are combined with Freund et al., claims 6-9 are not rendered unpatentable as being obvious.

Accordingly, it is submitted that claims 1-10 are patentable.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, the Applicants request reconsideration of the rejection and allowance of the claims.

Please charge any shortage in fees due in connection with the filing of this paper, including extension of time fees, or credit any overpayment, to the deposit account of Mattingly & Malur, P.C., Deposit Account No. 50-1417 (referencing attorney docket no. WK-5391).

Respectfully submitted,

MATTINGLY & MALUR, P.C.

/Gene W. Stockman/
Gene W. Stockman
Reg. No. 21,021
(703) 684-1120